Over 25 Years of Change in Men's Entry into Fatherhood, 1987-2013

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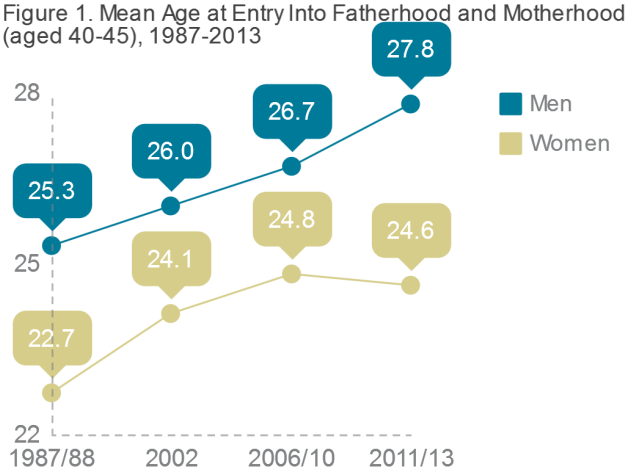
Over 80% of men have become fathers by their early forties (CDC, 2015), but the path to fatherhood varies considerably across social and demographic characteristics. In this Family Profile, we use nationally representative data from the National Survey of Families and Households (1987-1988) and the National Survey of Family Growth (2002, 2006-2013) to examine the average age at fatherhood among fathers aged 40-45. We begin by examining trends over the past 25 years in age at first birth among both fathers and mothers. We then move to investigate the fathers' age when his first child was born across relationship status, race/ethnicity, and education level, focusing on father in 2011-13

Average Age at Fatherhood & Motherhood

- Among fathers and mothers aged 40-45 in 2011/13, the mean age at first parenthood is 27.8 years for men and 24.6 years for women.
- On average, men are now about three years older than women when they become parents. The gap has widened in recent years as fathers' age at first birth (among those 40-45) has continued to increase whereas women's age at first birth has declined slightly.
- Men and women continue to delay the entry into parenthood.
  - Over twenty-five years ago, men aged 40-45 became fathers at an average age of 25.3 and are now 2.5 years older when they become fathers.
  - Women are almost two years older today when they became parents compared to 1987/88.

Figure 1. Mean Age at Entry Into Fatherhood and Motherhood (aged 40-45), 1987-2013



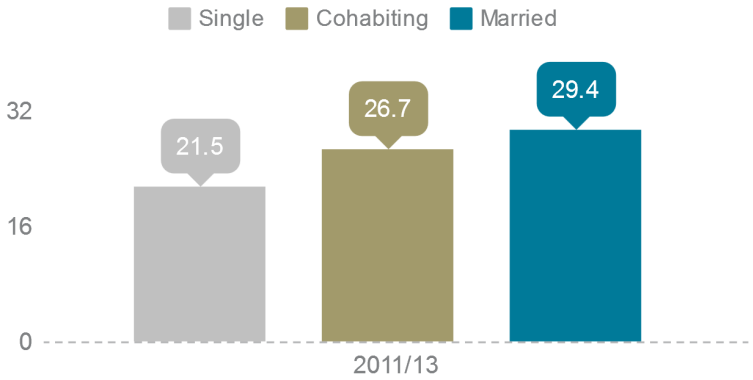
Source: National Survey of Families and Households, 1987/1988; National Survey of Family Growth, 2002, 2006/10 2011/13

Relationship Status Differences in Fathers' Average Age at Fatherhood

Among fathers aged 40-45 in 2011/13, those who were married when their first child was born had the highest average age, followed by cohabiting fathers and then fathers who were neither married nor cohabiting ("single").

- Married fathers experienced the transition to fatherhood at age 29.4, about three years older than fathers who were cohabiting and nearly eight years older than fathers who were single when their first child was born.
- Cohabiting men also became fathers later than single men, at an average age of 26.7 compared to 21.5 respectively.

Figure 2. Mean Age at Fatherhood According to Relationship Status, 2011/2013

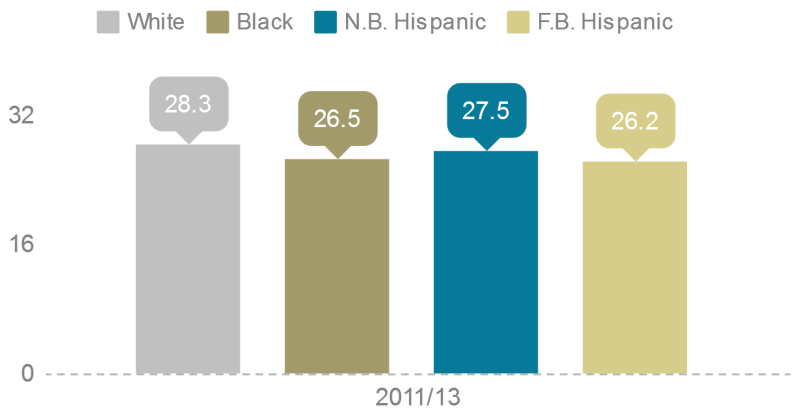


Source: National Survey of Family Growth, 2011/13

Racial and Ethnic Differences in Fathers' Average Age at Fatherhood

- Among fathers aged 40-45 in 2011/13, the mean age at first parenthood was highest among White men (age 28) and lowest among foreign-born Hispanic men (age 26).
  - Native-born Hispanic men followed with a mean age of 27.5, one year later than Black men and just over one year older than foreign-born Hispanic men.
  - There is little difference, on average, between Black and foreign-born Hispanic men in the age of entry into fatherhood.

Figure 3. Mean Age at Fatherhood According to Race and Ethnicity, 2011/2013

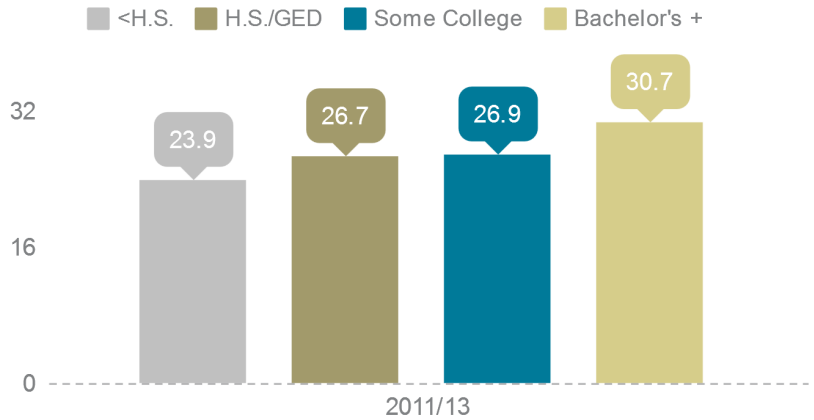


Note: N.B. represents Native Born and F.B. represents Foreign Born.
Source: National Survey of Family Growth, 2011/13

Education and Fathers' Average Age at Fatherhood

- There is a clear education gradient in the average age at fatherhood.
  - The highest average age at parenthood was among fathers who hold a Bachelor's degree or higher, at 30.7 years old.
  - The lowest average age at parenthood was among those with less than a high school degree, at 23.9 years old.
  - Fathers with a high school degree or GED and those with some college had similar ages at first birth (26.7 years and 26.9 years, respectively).

Figure 4. Mean Age at Fatherhood According to Education, 2011/2013



Source: National Survey of Family Growth, 2011/13

References:

CDC/National Center for Health Statistics. (2015, April 20). *Births (fathers)*. Retrieved from http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nsfg/key_statistics/b.htm#birthsfathers

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